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## Viol

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### Viol [viola da gamba, gamba]

(Fr. *violle*; Ger. *Gambe*; It. *viola, viola da gamba*).

A bowed string instrument with frets; in the Hornbostel-Sachs system it is classified as a bowed lute (or fiddle). It is usually played held downwards on the lap or between the legs (hence the name 'viola da gamba', literally 'leg viol'). It appeared in Europe towards the end of the 15th century and subsequently became one of the most popular of all Renaissance and Baroque instruments and was much used in ensemble music (see [CONSORT](#) and [CONTINUO](#)). As a solo instrument it continued to flourish until the middle of the 18th century. In 18th- and 19th-century American usage the term [BASS VIOL](#) was applied to a four-string instrument of the violin family.

### 1. Structure.

During its history the viol was made in many different sizes: *pardessus* (high treble), treble, alto, small tenor, tenor, bass and violone (contrabass). Only the treble, tenor and bass viols, however, were regular members of the viol consort. The *pardessus de viole* did not emerge until the late 17th century, and the violone – despite its appearance in the 16th century – was rarely used in viol consorts. The alto viol was rarely mentioned by theorists and there is some doubt as to how often it was used. Two small bass instruments called 'lyra' and 'division' viols were used in the performance of solo music in England (see [LYRA VIOL](#) and [DIVISION VIOL](#)). A full-sized bass viol, however, was played by soloists on the Continent in the Baroque era.

According to Mace (A1676) a consort or 'chest' of viols should be 'all truly and proportionably suited' in shape, wood and colour, but especially in size. The string length from nut to bridge on the treble viol, for instance, should ideally be exactly half that on the bass viol, the treble being tuned an octave higher than the bass. Application of this principle to the tenor viol is aided by the downward *a gamba* playing position; if it were applied to the tenor member of the modern string quartet, the result would be a viola too large for comfort (see [TENOR VIOLIN](#)).

The shape of the viol was extremely variable during much of its early history. Some 16th-century instruments show the influence of the guitar family or the violin family. A few have a festooned outline in the manner of an orpharion or bandora. By the 1540s a distinctive shape had evolved in Venice, which is characterized by steeply down-sloping shoulders and a narrow upper body. A significant number of examples by Francesco Linarol and Antonio and Battista Ciciliano have been preserved in collections in Vienna and Brussels, and the shape is also recorded in paintings by Titian, for example *Venus and Cupid with a Lute player*, c1565 (GB-CFm). The most characteristic form of viol, however, with its deep ribs, sloping shoulders and middle bouts appeared early in the 16th century and became fairly standard during the 17th and 18th centuries. The viol is very lightly constructed, both the belly and the back being made of very fine wood. The belly is gently arched, whereas the back is flat, except at the top, where it slopes in towards the neck. A few crossbars are usually fixed to the back to reinforce it. The ribs of the viol are quite deep (often reinforced with linings of parchment or linen), and since neither the belly nor the back projects beyond them there are no 'edges'. The neck of the Renaissance viol and early 17th-century English viol was thick and rounded like that of the contemporary cello. In the course of the 17th century the neck became flatter, and on the later French instruments, it was sometimes very thin, resembling that of a lute. Jean Rousseau (A1687) described how the late French makers

gave the viol its 'final perfection' by setting the neck at a greater angle, and also by reducing the overall thickness of the wood. Frets, made from pieces of stretched gut, are tied round the neck in a special fret knot. Normally, double frets are used (see [FRET, fig.](#)). There are usually seven frets placed at intervals of a semitone, but, according to Simpson (A1659), an eighth might be added at the octave. All frets can be finely adjusted to improve the tuning. Simpson said that the strings should lie close to the fingerboard 'for ease and convenience of Stopping'.

Most viols have six strings, but the solo bass viol played on the Continent during the Baroque era often had seven and the *pardessus* five. The standard tuning of the six-string viol was a sequence of 4th, 4th, major 3rd, 4th, 4th. Thus the three principal types of viol in a consort are tuned as follows: *d-g-c'-e'-a'-d''* (treble); *G-c-f-a-d'-g'* (tenor); and *D-G-c-e-a-d'* (bass). Players of the alto viol sometimes prefer a tuning in which the position of the major 3rd is altered: *c-f-a-d'-g'-c''*; English (and possibly some continental) bass viol players occasionally tuned their lowest string down to C. French bass viols of the Baroque era often had a seventh string (A'), an innovation attributed by Jean Rousseau in 1687 to Sainte-Colombe. This string, like the D and G strings, would be overspun with silver or another metal (see [OVERSPUN STRING](#)), all three preferably having the 'same covering', according to Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (who experimented also with half-covering on the c string). The 18th-century French [PARDESSUS](#) was usually tuned *g-c'-e'-a'-d''-g''*; from the 1730s the five-string *pardessus* was tuned *g-d'-a'-d''-g''*.

Like other fretted instruments such as the lute, the viol was usually tuned and played in equal temperament. According to Lindley (B1984), some 16th-century theorists such as Ganassi advocated a form of meantone temperament. This would have meant tuning the central third purer and enlarging slightly the four 4ths between remaining open strings. The frets would then have been adjusted to achieve at least some of the unequal tones and semitones that this temperament requires. The fact that any single fret determines the intonation for all six strings, however, must have imposed severe limitations on its use. Modern experiments suggest that meantone intonation on the viol is best reserved for pieces with a very limited range of key (see [TEMPERAMENTS, §8](#)).

All viols, whether supported on the calves (like the tenor and bass, see fig.10 below) or on the knees, are played in an upright, almost vertical, position. The bow is held in an underhand grip, the palm facing upwards. Simpson (A1659) wrote:

"Hold the Bow betwixt the ends of your Thumb and two foremost fingers, near to the Nut. The Thumb and first finger fastned on the Stalk; and the second fingers end turned in shorter, against the Hairs thereof; by which you may poize and keep up the point of the Bow."

The wrist should be relaxed, since quick notes 'must be express'd by moving some Joint nearer the hand; which is generally agreed upon to be the Wrist'. Heavy accents are not possible on the viol because the essence of both the up- ('forward-' or 'push-') and the down-bow ('back-bow' or 'pull-bow') is a movement across the string and not a movement downwards with the weight of the arm above the bow, as it is in violin bowing. Light accents, however, may be obtained by means of a small increase in pressure at the beginning of a stroke. This small pushing accent is more easily and naturally achieved with an up-bow. Thus viol bowing is the exact reverse of violin bowing and, as Simpson wrote, 'When you see an even Number of Quavers or Semiquavers, as 2, 4, 6, 8. You must begin with your Bow forward' (i.e. with an up-bow).

The early viol bow is characteristically convex (like an unstretched archer's bow) rather than concave like a violin bow. A concave design is found in some 18th-century French bows: this gives the advantage of a more sensitive response to nuance. The player governs tension by pressure with the middle finger directly on the hair (see figs.10 and 12 below); pressure on the stick itself would merely cause the hair to bend towards the arc of the stick. According to Danoville (A1687) a viol bow 'must be of Chinese wood, and should not be too heavy, because it makes the [bowing] hand clumsy, nor too light, because then it cannot play chords [easily] enough; but a weight proportioned to the hand, which is why I leave that to the choice of the one who plays the Viol'. Rousseau, however, wrote: 'But it seems to me that one finds many other sorts of woods used to make Bows, which are no less good than Chinese wood'. Chinese wood is almost certainly snakewood, but Trichet (see Lesure, E1955-6) pointed out that Brazilwood (of which

Pernambuco is a superior variety) was also known in France.

Because of the lightness of its body construction and the relatively low tension of its strings, the viol is an extremely resonant instrument and readily responds to the lightest stroke of the bow (see [ACOUSTICS, §II](#)). Its tone is quiet but has a reedy, rather nasal quality which is quite distinctive and makes it an ideal instrument for playing polyphony, in which clarity of texture is of the greatest importance. On the other hand the viol is less successful in music to be danced to, partly because its sound is rather restrained, but also because it cannot accent heavily enough.

The viol's capacity for resonance is enhanced by the way the left hand takes advantage of the frets. The finger presses the string down hard directly behind the fret and thereby produces an effect akin to that of an open string. A vital technique for achieving resonance – as well as for facility in fast passage-work – is the use of 'holds', whereby each finger, once placed behind a fret, remains there even after the note has been played, until it has to be moved to another position. This technique enables the instrument, in Simpson's words, 'to continue the Sound of a Note when the Bow hath left it'. For this, as for multiple stops, the fact that the placing of the frets guarantees stability of intonation enables the left hand to assume a greater variety of postures than would be possible on an unfretted instrument such as a violin or cello.

During the 16th and 17th centuries there were many highly skilled viol makers, particularly English craftsmen like John Rose, Henry Jaye and Richard Meares. Outstanding makers of the late 17th and 18th centuries included Barak Norman in England, Michel Colichon, Nicolas Bertrand and Guillaume Barbet in France, Jacob Stainer in the Tyrol and Joachim Tielke in Hamburg. Makers of the *pardessus* included Jean-Baptiste Dehay ('Saloman') and Louis Guersan.

**Ian Woodfield**

## 2. 15th-century origins.

The characteristic playing position of the viol seems to have been known in Europe as early as the 11th century, when waisted fiddles were played like viols, resting on the lap or between the knees with the bow held above the palm. A 12th-century miniature depicts an unusually large instrument of this type, which is sometimes referred to as the medieval viol (see [FIDDLE, §1](#)). Rebecs were also played in this way, as is shown in the famous 13th-century *Cantigas de Santa María* (see [REBEC](#), [not available online]). By the early 14th century, however, this method of playing bowed instruments had almost completely disappeared from Europe. But in Aragon rebecs were played *a gamba* throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, as shown for example in a mid-15th-century Aragonese miniature of King David ([GB-Lbl](#) Add.28962, f.82; see [REBEC](#), [not available online]) and in a painting of St Anthony Abbot by the Almodévar Master (Juan de la Abadía) (in [GB-Cfm](#)). The Aragonese rebec thus provides a link between the general disappearance of the *a gamba* playing posture at the end of the 13th century and its re-emergence two centuries later with the Renaissance viol.

Viols appear in late 15th-century paintings from the Aragonese province of Valencia. Fig.1 [not available online] shows a painting of the Virgin and Child, by a follower of Valentín Montolíu, which comes from the Maestrazgo, a mountainous region to the north of the Valencian district of Castellón de la Plana. It is one of the earliest known representations of the Renaissance viol, dating from about 1475. By 1500 the viol was regularly depicted in angelic consorts by Valencian, Majorcan and Sardinian painters. In the Cagliari Museo Nazionale is a fine full-length picture of an angel viol player, painted in about 1500 by the Sardinian Master of Castelsardo. This shows a fairly typical early Spanish viol with an extremely long narrow neck, frets, lateral pegs, central rose, very thin ribs and tenor-sized body with the characteristic viol shape, waisted but with marked corners. Like most other Valencian viols of this period it does not have a raised fingerboard, and instead of an arched bridge the strings pass over a low uncurved bar attached to the belly. In other paintings the strings are actually fixed to the bar as on a plucked instrument. The Castelsardo Master's viol with its long neck, thin ribs and generally slim outline appears to have been a tall instrument, quite distinct from the shorter, deeper-bodied viol that became standard in Italy during the 16th century. Later Valencian viols of the type pictured by the St Lazarus Master do, in fact,

have shorter necks and wider, deeper waists, but still retain the thin ribs. On the belly of this particular instrument is a pattern of ornaments characteristic of the *vihuela de mano*. Iconographic evidence suggests that the viol was the result of applying the traditional Aragonese technique of rebec playing to a new bowed instrument whose size and body construction were essentially those of the plucked *vihuela de mano*. For such instruments, the term *vihuela de arco* seems appropriate.

The viol quickly spread across the Mediterranean through the Balearic Islands and Sardinia to Italy. Its advance was probably assisted by the Borgia family from Valencia, from whose ranks came two popes, Calixtus III and Alexander VI. It was during the pontificate of Alexander VI (1492–1503) that viols began to appear in Rome and in cities to the north, such as Urbino and Ferrara, that were dominated by the Borgias. Some of the earliest representations of viols in Italian art are by painters working in those areas: Costa in Ferrara, Francia in Bologna and Raphael (as well as Timoteo Viti) in Urbino and Rome.

The court of Isabella d'Este at Mantua seems to have been particularly receptive to new Spanish instruments of all kinds, which included the *vihuela de mano* and possibly a Spanish form of lute, as well as the viol. In the last decade of the 15th century Lorenzo de Pavia, Isabella's agent, was frequently involved in the purchase or repair of a range of instruments made 'in the Spanish manner': the 'viola spagnola', the 'viola a la spagnola', the 'liutto a la spagnola' and the plain 'spagnola'. It is probable that one of the earliest viol consorts ever made was the one provided for Isabella by Lorenzo from a workshop in Brescia.

In 1493 the chronicler Bernardo Prospero reported that some Spanish musicians had come from Rome to Mantua playing viols 'as tall as I am' ('viole grande quasi come me'). These Spanish players had probably come from Valencia to Rome with Rodrigo Borgia (Alexander VI). Their 'viole grande' may have been long-necked Spanish viols. Tall, slim viols with long necks appear also in Italian paintings of this period, notably in Lorenzo Costa's *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints*, on an altarpiece dated 1497 (in S Giovanni in Monte, Bologna), and Timoteo Viti's painting of the same subject (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan). In other early 16th-century Italian paintings the viol appears as a more fully developed instrument. Raphael in his *Allegory of St Cecilia* (c1513–16; Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna) depicted a tenor viol with a carved lion's head scroll and nearly all the characteristics of a typical 17th-century instrument: deep ribs, sloping shoulders, flat back bending in at the upper end towards the neck, two c-holes, frets, six pegs and a slightly arched belly. This picture illustrates the most important single change that the viol underwent in Italy: the older flat-bridged Valencian type gave way to the instrument with an arched bridge and a fingerboard. In effect, Italian makers enabled the viol, which had hitherto probably had a melodic and a drone-playing capability only, to develop into an instrument fully equipped to play an individual line in a polyphonic ensemble. As a direct result of this fundamental change of identity, there was now the need to make viols of different sizes. At first, only two sizes, tenor and bass, were required. Ensemble music for which these sets of large viols were well suited included textless polyphony, and frottolas which could be performed by solo voice and instruments.

Although there is no iconographic evidence of any viol-like instrument in 15th-century German art, numerous references to groups of 'Geigen' players in archival sources led Polk (F1989) to propose that a tradition of string consort playing began to take root north of the Alps, and that German instrumentalists employed in the Italian courts played a significant role in the early development of the viol as an ensemble instrument. However, Woodfield (B1991) has argued that the term 'Geige' itself was a generic one, which could with equal reason be taken to refer to other bowed or plucked instruments or to mixed ensembles. The first iconographic evidence that the viol had entered the domains of Maximilian I comes in the early years of the 16th century.

A bass viol is pictured in Grünewald's famous Isenheim altarpiece (1512/13–15), although the bowing technique of the player is obviously unrealistic. Martin Agricola in his *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (A1529) hinted at the southern origins of viols by describing them as 'grosse welschen Geygen' ('large Italian fiddles'). The curious woodcuts of 'grosse Geygen' printed by Agricola, like some Valencian depictions of viols, show instruments without fingerboard, bridge or tailpiece; the strings pass over a rose and are attached to a bar on the belly. Woodfield noted that the large majority of extant depictions of this instrument come from Basle – Agricola's woodcut, for example, derives directly from that in Virdung's *Musica getutsch* (Basle, 1511). He suggested that the origins of its characteristic shape may lie in the flamboyant lira da braccio outlines the kind depicted by Cima da Conegliano, woodcuts of which were readily

available in Basle.

Early German theorists point to the closeness of the relationship between the viol and lute. Judenkünig, for example, equated the viol with the lute. Both instruments are pictured together on the title-page woodcut of his 1523 treatise, and in the introduction he stated that his instructions were for both. Yet the viol is scarcely mentioned in the text and all the musical examples are for lute, so it is not clear how the viol player was expected to use the treatise. Some early Renaissance writers classified bowed and plucked instruments together. Tinctoris (*De inventione et usu musicae*, c1487) wrote of two types of 'viola', 'sine arculo' ('without a bow') and 'cum arculo' ('with a bow'), as though they were members of the same family.

Ian Woodfield

### 3. Continental Europe c1500 to c1600.

The terminology of the viol family during the 16th century was varied and at times extremely confusing. The generic word 'viola' (viol) included two quite different instruments, the viola 'da braccio' (i.e. 'arm' viol) and the viola 'da gamba' (i.e. 'leg' viol). Few writers before the middle of the century, however, used either modifying phrase. While some Italian and Spanish writers used the phrase viola 'da arco' or vihuela 'de arco' (i.e. bowed viol) in order to distinguish the viol from plucked instruments, the clarifying phrase 'de arco' was often omitted. Further confusion was caused by the widespread use of the word 'viola' to refer to the **LIRA DA BRACCIO**. Some theorists, therefore, referred to the 'fretted' viol, the *lira* being unfretted. The title-page of Ganassi's viol tutor (A1542) is unusually specific in its reference to the 'violone d'arco da tasti' ('bowed fretted viol'). The terminology of viol consorts was at times equally inconsistent. Italian writers, for example, often described consorts in terms of the bass instrument, the violone. Thus, references to 'violoni' or 'violoni da gamba' do not necessarily imply a consort consisting entirely of bass viols. The term 'violoni', however, can easily be confused with 'violini' or 'violons', meaning violins. In fact, isolated references to viols in literary works, inventories and account books are often ambiguous.

Despite the confusing terminology, there is ample evidence that the viol was popular at many 16th-century courts. Baldassare Castiglione wrote enthusiastically of the viol consort ('quattro viole da arco') in his *Il libro del cortegiano* (Venice, 1528; Eng. trans. by T. Hoby, 1561), a vivid description of life in an early 16th-century court: 'The musicke with a sette of violes doth no lesse delite a man: for it is verrie sweet and artificiall'. Theorists too commented on the upper-class status of the viol. Jambe de Fer (A1556), for example, wrote that the viol was played by 'gentlemen, merchants and other men of virtue' as a pastime, whereas the violin was usually considered a 'professional' instrument of the lower classes, often played in the streets to accompany dances or to lead wedding processions. Shakespeare attests to the viol's noble status; and Moll in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611) is deeply indignant when her porter refers to her viol as a 'fiddle', although another character suggests that the viol is considered by many as 'an unmannerly instrument for a woman'. By the later 18th century the viol was seldom found outside the court music room.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that the viol was played only by amateurs for their private enjoyment. Many courts employed professional viol players – sometimes complete consorts – to perform in the musical *intermedi* given at royal weddings or other special occasions. In 1502, at the wedding of Alfonso d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia at Ferrara, one of the *intermedi* included music played by six viols. Throughout the century, the viol consort remained an essential part of the Renaissance *intermedio* 'orchestra'. It was most frequently used with other consorts of instruments, such as flutes or trombones, and sometimes in even larger ensembles. Some of the viol players hired for these special occasions were doubtless skilled professionals able to perform elaborate ornamentation. The names of several celebrated violists have survived; Ganassi mentioned two in his treatise – Giuliano Tibertino and Lodovico Lasagnino. The popularity of the viol with amateur players resulted in the publication of several viol tutors. Many general treatises on music, too, included sections devoted to viol playing or viol music (the most significant are listed in the bibliography). These treatises, together with iconographic evidence, present a surprisingly complete picture of the viol and the way it was played.



Ganassi was the first writer to describe in detail the standard method of holding the viol – firmly between the knees, but with the knees not impeding the bowstroke. His method is illustrated on the title-page woodcut of *Regola rubertina*. Yet iconographic evidence shows that viols were often played in positions other than those recommended in textbooks. Two of the famous viol players pictured by Paolo Veronese in his *Marriage at Cana* (1562–3) in the Louvre are holding their viols in an almost horizontal position. This posture was condemned by Ganassi. Bass viol players are sometimes pictured standing, with their viols either resting on the ground or supported on a small stool (as described by Jambe de Fer), or even held against the body with no visible means of support at all. This last method, illustrated by the woodcut in *Judenk nig* (A1523), looks highly improbable since the player has to support the weight of the instrument while playing it. Jambe de Fer, however, described a device used by players of the bass *viola da braccio* to help take the weight of their instrument. This consisted of a small hook worn by the player which could be attached to an iron ring fixed to the back of his instrument – an arrangement which may on occasion have been adopted by bass viol players. But despite these and other unusual playing positions, the standard posture as described by Ganassi remained almost unchanged and was firmly advocated by later 17th-century English theorists.

In the second volume of his viol tutor (A1543) Ganassi described fingering techniques in some detail. He gave five different fingerings for a scale (shown in [ex.1](#)). It is clear from his fourth and fifth alternatives that he intended the viol player to make full use of high positions. Indeed, his *ricercares* for solo viol contain some quite extended high passages, up to a 9th above the open top string. Alternative fingerings avoid unnecessary string crossing ([ex.2](#)). The *ricercares* for solo viol and the madrigal arrangement for voice and viol contain many chords, some of which are facilitated by Ganassi's use of the *barr * (one finger laid flat across two or more strings).



Ex.1



Ex.2

The characteristic 'underhand' viol bowing was described by Ganassi. He started with the basic techniques, such as the grip with the thumb and middle finger holding the bow and the index finger applying the required amount of pressure; the different types of bowstroke; the use of arm in sustaining long notes, and the wrist in playing fast passage-work; and the need to keep the bowing arm firm but flexible. The correct use of up- and down-bows is explained at great length. Moreover, some of the musical examples have bowing marks, a dot beneath a note or letter indicating a down-bow, and the absence of a dot an up-bow. There are no slur marks as such, but there are occasionally two consecutive up- or down-bows, both articulated. Ortiz's *Trattado* suggests that groups of two or three fast notes ('semiminimas') should be played in one bow. But the quick passage-work in Ganassi's *ricercares* for solo viol is fully bowed out, usually with up-bows on the strong beats.

Ganassi's most interesting comments concern the style of good viol playing and the variety of tone which a good viol can produce. In the section on bowing, for example, he wrote that the best place to bow is at a distance of four fingers' width from the bridge. But he also described the rougher sound of the strings near the bridge and their more restrained sound near the fingerboard. The viol player, it would seem, was completely at liberty to use these different sound qualities if he so desired. Ganassi also referred to a 'tremar' (shaking) of the bowing arm and the left hand, possibly an indication of tremolando and vibrato. These and similar passages all serve to emphasize Ganassi's view that viol playing should be above all else expressive, and that the best way to play expressively is to imitate the human voice. To illustrate this, one of his most important points, he compared the viol player to the orator, who expresses his meaning to his listeners by gestures of the hand and changes in the tone of his voice. In the same way, he wrote, the good viol player should aim at variety and be sensitive to the music that is being played; and should not, for example, bow with vigour in 'sad and afflicted' music.

The earliest printed source of viol tunings is Agricola's *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (A1529), which gives the following tunings: *f-a-d'-g'-c''* (*discantus*); *c-f-a-d'-g'* (*altus, tenor*); *G-c-f-a-d'-g'* (*bassus*). These tunings are clearly based on a single sequence of intervals for the whole consort, and consequently the position of the third varies within the consort. Most later theorists gave tunings in which all viols have the same sequence of intervals.

Ganassi devoted a large section of his tutor to explaining four 'regole' (rules) for consort tuning. The first three are given in Table 1. The fourth rule, which according to Ganassi was used by most players, is rather different. Entitled 'Modo de sonar una quarta piu alta' ('how to play a 4th higher'), it consists of a tuning for five-string viols (Table 2). It seems that the purpose of this tuning was to enable the performer to play in a higher position on a viol tuned to a lower pitch. The tenor viol, for example, is tuned just like the bass viol of the first three tunings without its lowest string: *[D-]G-c-e-a-d'*. The note *g'*, therefore, which in the first tuning is the open top string, has to be played on the fifth fret above the top string. In other words, the fourth rule involves a change of position, not pitch. Gerle gave an identical tuning for viols with five strings. Unlike Ganassi, however, he implied that a sixth string could be added, a 4th below the other five. A six-string bass, therefore, would presumably be tuned *[A'-]D-G-B-e-a*, although Gerle did not actually give the low notes in any of his charts.

TABLE 1

	<i>Soprano</i>	<i>Tenor</i>	<i>Bass</i>
rule 1	<i>d-g-c'-e'-a'-d''</i>	<i>G-c-f-a-d'-g'</i>	<i>D-G-c-e-a-d'</i>
rule 2	<i>d-g-c'-e'-a'-d''</i>	<i>A-d-g-b-e'-a'</i>	<i>D-G-c-e-a-d'</i>
rule 3	<i>c-f-b♭-d'-g'-c''</i>	<i>G-c-f-a-d'-g'</i>	<i>D-G-c-e-a-d'</i>

TABLE 2

<i>Soprano</i>	<i>Tenor</i>	<i>Bass</i>
<i>d-g-b-</i>	<i>G-c-e-a-d'</i>	<i>D-G-b-e-a</i>
<i>e'-a'</i>		

Theorists of the late 16th and early 17th centuries gave one of two tunings. Cerreto and Mersenne gave the normal 'd tuning' as in Ganassi's first and second rules. Zacconi, Banchieri, Cerone and Praetorius gave a 'G tuning', a 5th lower. Banchieri, for example, gave the tunings in Table 3. The problem of these two quite different tunings is partly one of confusing terminology. The 'tenor' viol of the low-pitched consort was the exact equivalent of the 'bass' viol of the high-pitched consort. Thus the name given to a viol depended more on its relative position in the consort than on its absolute size or pitch. Very little music appears to have been composed for the low *G*-tuned consort; almost all 16th- and 17th-century viol music is for the higher *d*-tuned instruments. It has therefore been suggested that the low-pitched viols were used in concerted music, doubling other instruments and voices. The origins of the low *G*-tuned viol consort remain something of a mystery. The relationship between the low-pitched viols of the late 16th century and the earlier five-string viols described by Gerle and by Ganassi in his fourth rule may be significant (Table 4).

TABLE 3

violone in contrabasso (violone)	<i>D'-G'-C-E-A-</i> <i>d</i>
violone da gamba (bass)	<i>G'-C-F-A-d-</i> <i>g</i>
viola mezzana da gamba (tenor, alto)	<i>D-G-c-e-a-d'</i>
quarta viola in soprano (treble)	<i>G-c-f-a-d'-g'</i>

TABLE 4

Gerle	<i>[A']-D-G-B-e-a</i>
Ganassi	<i>D-G-B-e-a</i>
Praetorius	<i>A'-D-G-B-e-a</i> (or <i>G'-C-F-A-d-g</i> )

An interesting regional variant in viol tunings was given by Jambe de Fer, who contrasted the tunings of Italy and France. His 'Italian' tuning follows the standard sequence of intervals (4th–4th–3rd–4th–4th). In France, however, it was apparently the custom to play on five-string viols tuned to a sequence of 4ths without the 3rd. This 'French' tuning is confirmed by Mareschall's

*Porta musices* (Table 5).

TABLE 5

<i>Jambe de Fer</i>	<i>Mareschall</i>
dessus e–a–d'–g'–c" discant	f#–b–e'–a'–d"
taille B–e–a–d'–g' tenor	B–e–a–d'–g'
bas E–A–d–g–c' bass	E–A–d–g–c'

The earliest printed collections of music for viol consort are the two editions of Gerle's *Musica teusch* (A1532, A1546), which contain transcriptions of vocal music – German Tenorlieder and Parisian chansons. These pieces are short and often quite chordal. There is a similar collection of German secular music transcribed for viols in an earlier manuscript dated 1524 (*D-Mu* 4<sup>o</sup> cod.718). But such collections are exceptional, since most 16th-century consort music was neither composed nor arranged for specific instruments. Instead composers usually gave a general direction such as 'da sonar' ('to be played'). There can be little doubt, however, that viol consorts regularly performed both vocal music – masses, motets, madrigals and chansons – and instrumental ricercares and fantasias. Several printed collections of ricercares by composers such as Willaert and Tiburtino (a violone player) were published during the mid-16th century. These would almost certainly have been used by viol players.

The first printed source of solo viol music is Ganassi's *Regola rubertina*, which includes several ricercares for viol and one madrigal arrangement for viol and voice. The ricercares are short 'improvisations' consisting of running scales, cadential flourishes and some double stopping. In the arrangement of the madrigal *Io vorei dio d'amor* the viol accompanies the voice with a series of chords. This most interesting piece was probably intended as an imitation of the chordal style of playing associated with the *lira da braccio*. *Regola rubertina* also includes three exercises for practising various intervals. Some similar exercises are given in Mareschall's *Porta musices*; like Ganassi's they are intended to help the student practise difficult intervals and awkward leaps. The art of playing divisions (i.e. improvising ornaments) was an essential part of the musical education of all 16th-century musicians, and Ortiz devoted the whole of his treatise on viol playing to this subject. His musical examples include ornamented cadential patterns for viol consort, freely ornamented versions of vocal pieces for solo viol and keyboard, and 'improvisations' over well-known bass patterns like the folia and the romanesca. Ortiz's arrangements of Sandrin's chanson *Doulce memoire* and Arcadelt's madrigal *O felici occhi miei* are among the most beautiful 16th-century pieces for solo viol. The ornamentation is restrained but by no means confined to standard cadential patterns. Towards the end of the century a small bass viol, the **VIOLA BASTARDA**, was developed specifically to perform divisions.

Ian Woodfield

## 4. England.

The viol was introduced into England some time early in the reign of Henry VIII, perhaps, as suggested by Holman (C1993), by members of the van Wilder family. In 1526 two viol players, Hans Hossenet and Hans Highorne, entered regular employment at a monthly salary of 33s. 4d. In contrast with Italy and Germany, where its impact was immediate, there is little evidence to suggest that the viol spread rapidly into English society, and not until the 1530s is there any significant evidence of ownership of viols outside the royal court. In 1540 the appointment of Henry VIII's 'newe vialles', who comprised a complete consort of string players from Venice, Milan and Cremona, provided a strong impetus to the growth of the viol's popularity in England. Despite their official Italian identities, Prior (C1983) has shown that Henry's viol players were in fact Jews from northern Italian sephardic communities. The rapidly increasing popularity of the viol at the Tudor court is reflected in the inventory of Henry VIII's great collection of instruments (*GB-Lbl* Harl.1419), compiled at the end of his reign in 1547. It includes an item 'ix Vialles greate and small with iii cases of woodde covered with blacke leather to the same'. A few years later, English viol players were employed: in 1549 Thomas Kent was 'admitted to the Vialles in place of greate Hans deceased', and from 1554 Thomas Browne appeared regularly in the lists of players.





English and French manners of playing the viol: (a) title-page from Simpson's *The Division-Violist* (London, 1659); (b) engraving by Nicolas Bonnart, 1664; note the bow grips, and the 7th string of the French instrument  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

The introduction of the viol into the curriculum of London choir schools during the reign of Henry VIII marked a new era of growth in England. By the mid-century, selected choirboys at the Chapel Royal, St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey were receiving regular tuition. In 1582 Sebastian Westcote, the Master of the Children at St Paul's, bequeathed to the Almonry his 'cheste of vyalyns and vialles' for the use of the pupils. For a while in the 1560s the children viol players of St Paul's occupied an especially prominent place in the ceremonial and theatrical activities undertaken by their school. At the Goldsmiths' Annual Feast on 17 June 1560, for example, company members were regaled with musical entertainment during their meal: 'And all the dynner tyme the syngyng chylidren of Paules played upon their vialles & songe verve pleasaunt songes to the delectacion & rejoyssynge of the whole companie'. Incidental music and song accompaniments were also provided for plays. The interlude 'Wyt and Science' (c1545) by John Redford, organist of St Paul's, calls for a viol consort on stage: 'Heere cumth in fowre wyth viales and syng'. The long-term influence of the choirboy viol players was considerable. Generations of trained musicians entered the wider musical community in young adulthood with their viol playing skills. Furthermore, musical genres which had some early association with the choir schools (the In Nomine, the consort song and the consort anthem) retained a prominent place in the English repertory for the instrument.

The extent to which viol playing was taken up by amateur players in 16th-century England has been the subject of some controversy. Doe (C1977) argued that the spread of the viol outside the immediate environs of the Tudor court was very limited indeed. It is clear from Woodfill's documentary evidence, however, that there was a steady increase in the ownership of sets of viols in large Elizabethan households. In 1537, to take an early example, the accounts of the Earl of Rutland show that 53s. 4d. was paid for 'four viols bought at London'. Neither this, nor the activities of the choirboy consorts, however, prove the existence of a strong tradition of amateur playing; not until the beginning of the 17th century did the viol consort achieve widespread currency. Even then, pictorial evidence of its popularity remains surprisingly scarce. The painting of Sir Henry Unton from shortly after 1596 (in the National Portrait Gallery, London; see [MASQUE](#), [not available online]) is exceptional. It depicts a domestic [CONSORT](#) of five viol players seated round a table. A typical 17th-century 'chest' of viols as described by North (see Wilson, C1959) included two trebles, two tenors and two basses.

With the instruments of the younger [JOHN ROSE](#) (d 1611), the English viol found its classic outline (although not all Rose's surviving instruments are to this pattern). His father, also named John (fl 1552–61), was well established as a viol maker by the mid-16th century and successfully exported his instruments to Italy. John Stow rated the son's gifts 'as a maker of Bandoras, the Voyall de Gamboes and other instruments' as 'far exceeding' those of his father (*Annales*, 1631). John Rose's viols in the elegant classical shape share the same basic features of the Venetian instruments of Ventura Linarol (b 1539/40): both are lightly built with sloping shoulders, deep ribs and a flat back with the bend and slope towards the neck, and the table and back meeting the ribs flush at right angles. A distinctive feature of English viol design, perhaps developed by Rose himself, was the use of five pieces of wood for the belly. A further characteristic of some of Rose's surviving instruments, which was used by the later English makers, is extravagant decoration using geometrical designs in purfling and cross-hatching etched out with a hot needle. The viols of Henry Jaye (fl c 1610–67) of Southwark were the most prized in the mid-17th century. Two other makers of particular importance were Richard Meares and Barak Norman; the latter's surviving bass viols are generally of the smaller division size, which seems to have been preferred in the late 17th and early 18th century.

Instruction books on viol playing appeared during the 17th century. Robinson's *The Schoole of*

*Musicke* (A1603) and Playford's *A Breefe Introduction* (A1654) were intended primarily for consort players. For viol players wishing to learn the solo techniques of the lra and division viols there were Playford's *Musick's Recreation on the Lyra Viol* (A1652), Simpson's remarkably comprehensive *The Division-Violist* (A1659) and Hely's *The Compleat Violist* (A1699). The existence of a flourishing school of solo viol playing led to some refinements of technique including the slur, the 'thump' or pizzicato (on the lra viol), and the hold (see §1 above and [Table 6](#)). Hume even made use of the *col legno*, instructing the player to 'Drum this with the back of your bow'. On the more basic matters of posture, bowing and fingering, 17th-century writers mainly followed their 16th-century predecessors. The importance of a correct or 'decent' posture, however, was given particular emphasis. Simpson, for example, criticized the playing of fast notes with the whole arm, on the grounds that 'it will cause the whole body to shake, which (by all means) must be avoyded; as also any other indecent Gesture'. There was also controversy about how best to use the elbow joint in bowing. Some, like Simpson, preferred it rigid; others, like Mace, 'Something Plying or Yielding to an Agile Bending'.

## TABLES

Viol	Viola	Violon

Consorts of viols continued to be popular in England longer than on the Continent. As North observed, 'the use of chests of violls, which supplied all instrumental consorts, kept back the English from falling soon into the modes of forreйн countrys, where the violin and not the treble viol was in use'. In fact it was the bass viol that lasted the longest, for despite North's comments the 'extraordinary jolly' violin had begun to rival the treble viol quite early in the 17th century. The popularity of the violin was finally established during the Restoration period. Charles II detested the contrapuntal fancies of viol consorts, preferring instead the 'brisk and arie' sound of violins. Yet the bass viol lingered on as an amateur instrument, particularly for playing basso continuo lines, because of its subtle tone and ease in executing fast passages. Samuel Pepys enjoyed evenings devoted to 'the vvall and singing'; the practice of singing to an improvised chordal accompaniment on the bass viol (as an alternative to the lute or theorbo) persisted throughout the 17th century.

The earliest source of English consort music is Henry VIII's songbook ([GB-Lbl Add.31922](#); ed. in MB, xviii, 1962, 2/1969), which dates from the early 16th century. The short, textless 'consorts' contained in that manuscript were probably not composed with any particular instrument in mind. In the mid-16th century English composers began to write textless polyphony, some of which may well have been intended for performance on viols. The most characteristic form was the plainsong In Nomine, a cantus-firmus composition based on a short section of plainsong from the Benedictus of Taverner's Mass '*Gloria tibi trinitas*' (see Dart and Donington, C1949). The earliest settings by Tallis are very vocal in style with smoothly flowing melodic lines. Tye, the first prolific composer of In Nomines, gave many of his compositions titles like *Rachells Weeping*, *Weepe no more Rachell* and *My death*. The In Nomine came to be regarded as a kind of test piece in which the composer tried to display contrapuntal skill or experimental ingenuity. Tye's In Nomine *Trust*, for example, is in 5/4.

Although few in number, William Byrd's works for viol consort are diverse and of uniformly high quality. They range from the exquisitely crafted and intensely polyphonic three-part fantasias to the large-scale six-part, multi-sectional works, which include popular tunes and dance-like sections (in one case a complete galliard). Some of the finest are *sui generis*: the famous 'Browning' with its astonishing ending exploring exquisitely controlled false relations, and the very fine five-part canonic fantasia. Not least remarkable of Byrd's qualities as a composer for viols is the transparency of texture he achieves, even in the most complex polyphony.

With a new generation of composers led by Alfonso Ferrabosco (ii), the polyphonic fantasia became the favoured form of composition for viol consort. In some ways the early English fantasia resembled its continental model, but North's opinion was that English composers improved on their Italian predecessors by 'working more elaborately'. Of the many 16th-century dances the stately pavan was most popular with composers of viol consort music. Ferrabosco and Tomkins, in particular, wrote some remarkably sonorous five-part pavans. The influence of the fantasia on the pavan was sometimes marked. By the mid-17th century some pavans, such as those by Jenkins, had developed into quite extended contrapuntal compositions.

The most significant development in late 16th-century consort music was undoubtedly the growth of idiomatic writing for the viol. On the Continent *ricercares*, fantasias and canzonas were still

being described as 'da sonar' ('to be played'). But in England instrumentation was often specified in more detail. Thus English composers were able to distinguish between the comparatively restricted range of the voice and the wider compass of the viol. Tomkins, for example, commenting on a series of fantasias by Ferrabosco ([GB-Lbl Add.29996](#)), wrote 'made only for the vyolls and organ which is the Reason that he takes such liberty of compass which he would have Restrained; if it had bin made for voyces only'. Playing above the frets, therefore, became quite common as the viol's upper register was increasingly exploited. The solo viol repertory was also influential in the development of idiomatic consort music. Although the technique of playing divisions was well known, some early 17th-century composers wrote out the divisions they wanted rather than leaving them to be improvised by the performer. Two examples of this, from an In Nomine by Gibbons and a fantasia by Ravenscroft, are given in [ex.3](#). Simpson (A1659) printed a table of ornaments or 'graces' for the solo viol player including 'beats', 'elevations', 'backfalls' and 'relishes'. Ornament signs, however, varied greatly at this period. Some ornaments could be performed 'by the bow'. Simpson mentioned 'a Shake or Tremble with the Bow, like the Shaking-Stop of an Organ' (?tremolo), but he did not recommend 'the frequent use thereof'.



Ex.3 (a) Gibbons: In Nomine (MB, ix, 1955) (b) Ravenscroft: Fantasia (GB-Lbl Add.19758)

The development of idiomatic writing is perhaps best seen in the 'broken' consorts of the early 17th century in which bowed, plucked, keyboard and wind instruments were combined. A typical instrumentation is found in Morley's *First Booke of Consort Lessons* (1599), which contains original compositions and arrangements for treble and bass viols, 'flute' (recorder), cittern, lute and bandora, each instrument with its own idiomatic part. During the 17th century many different instrumentations were tried, including both consort viols and solo lute and division viols, as for example in the consorts for treble, bass and lute viols by Ferrabosco and Hume, the consorts for violin, division viol, theorbo and harp by William Lawes, the duets for keyboard and bass viol published in *Parthenia In-Violata* (RISM C1614<sup>23</sup>) and the fantasia-suites for one or two violins, bass viol and organ by Ferrabosco and Coprario.

There can be little doubt that viols were often used in the performance of vocal music. Directions such as 'Apt for Viols and Voyces' or 'to be played on Musically Instruments' are frequently found on the title-pages of late 16th- and early 17th-century publications. Moreover, printed vocal music was sometimes copied out without text and (in the words of Roger North) 'for variety used as instrumentall consorts, with the first words of the song for a title'. A large selection of Italian madrigals by Marenzio, Monteverdi, Ferrabosco and others was copied out in this way ([GB-Lbl Add.37402-6](#)). Unlike the madrigal, the English consort song, which dates from the mid-16th century, was written specifically for viols and solo voice or voices. The greatest composer of consort songs was undoubtedly Byrd, whose lament for his friend Tallis, *Ye sacred muses*, is a magnificent example of the genre. During the early 17th century the consort song continued to flourish and even influenced other forms: composers such as Orlando Gibbons used the viol consort in the verse anthem.

By the mid-17th century newer forms such as the suite or 'sett', a flexible combination of fantasias and dances, were becoming increasingly popular. There were also some important changes in instrumentation. The 'whole' consort of three to six viols was often replaced by the 'broken' consort of violins, bass viols and organ. The organ, in fact, became a regular member of the viol consort. Parts for the organ varied from simple score reductions of the viol parts (as in the magnificent set of five-part fantasias by Jenkins) to completely independent parts, sometimes with quite extended solo sections (as in Jenkins's airs for two trebles, two basses and organ). The treble-bass polarity of these airs is indicative of the move towards trio sonata texture. In later trio sonatas (e.g. by Purcell) the viol continued to be given phrases independent of the keyboard; during the 18th century, however, the cello superseded the viol in this genre. Locke and other Restoration composers wrote much music for the new instrumentation of one or two trebles (viols or violins), bass viol and organ. Tempo and dynamic indications such as 'long tyme', 'away', 'drag', 'lowde' and 'verrie softe' became more common during this period. By the time of Purcell

polyphonic fantasias and In Nomines were old-fashioned. Much of this kind of viol music was used, in the words of North, 'in the fire for singeing pullets'. Yet Purcell's compositions in these forms are among the finest ever composed, a fitting conclusion to the long tradition of consort music in England.

The post-Restoration repertory is small. It includes, besides the Purcell fantasias, several works by Simpson, among them 12 fantasias ('The Monthes') and four fantasia-suites ('The Seasons'), as well as the seven examples of divisions at the back of his influential tutor, *The Division-Violist*, which was highly admired by North and republished as late as 1712. Other late uses of the viol are by Gottfried Finger (for one or two bass viols with and without continuo – some of which use scordatura – and trios for violin, bass viol and continuo), Benjamin Hely (for unaccompanied bass viol, and duos with and without continuo) and William Gorton (*Never Publish'd Before a Choice Collection of New Ayres Compos'd and Contriv'd for Two Bass-Viols*, 1701). Virtuoso transcriptions for bass viol exist of Corelli's op.5 violin sonatas and also of vocal works in Walsh and Hare's publication *Aires and Symphonies for the Bass Viol* (c1710). As late as 1724 Handel supplied a bass viol part, making idiomatic use of chords and arpeggio patterns, in an aria from *Giulio Cesare*.

The bass viol remained popular with amateur musicians well into the 18th century, as both a solo and a continuo instrument, and the arrival in England during the 1758–9 season of Carl Friedrich Abel, the instrument's last famous virtuoso, stimulated a short-lived but significant revival of interest. Abel's playing, according to Burney 'was in every way complete and perfect' and his compositions 'easy and elegantly simple'. His works for viol include a large number of easy sonatas with continuo, an aria with viol obbligato and several virtuoso and highly idiomatic sonatas for unaccompanied bass viol. After his death in 1787 Burney remarked that Abel's 'favourite instrument was not in general use and will probably die with him'.

Gainsborough, an enthusiastic amateur, and a friend of Abel, wrote to a friend on 4 June 1772: 'I'm sick of Portraits and wish very much to take my Viol da Gamba and walk off to some sweet Village when I can paint Landscips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness and ease'. Another artist who studied 'viol di gamba' in his youth (c1766) was Thomas Jones. One of the aristocratic enthusiasts for the viol at this period was Lady Spencer. The Althorpe accounts in 1773 and 1774 ([GB-Lbl](#) Althorpe F 184) contain references to the purchase of two complete sets of viol strings, to the 'Putting a Viol da Gamba in order', and to the supply of a 'Bow for the Viola da Gamba'. Mrs Howe wrote to Lady Spencer on 29 December 1779 ([GB-Lbl](#) Althorpe F 45) that she was looking forward to 'hearing one of y<sup>r</sup> new pieces of musick upon y<sup>r</sup> Viol de gambo'. New and fashionable repertory was provided not only by Abel but apparently also by J.C. Bach, who in 1773 took legal action against Longman, Lukey & Co. for publishing an unauthorized edition of 'a new sonata' for keyboard and viola da gamba. A manuscript of three sonatas for viola da gamba and keyboard by Bach was auctioned at Sotheby's at the sale of 28–9 May 1992. The only 18th-century public performance with piano and viola da gamba so far recorded took place at Coopers' Hall in King Street, Bristol, on 17 January 1771. The programme included: 'a song by Miss Marshall, accompanied by the Piano Forte and Viol de Gambo' and 'a favourite Lesson on the Harpischord by Miss Marshall, accompanied by the Viol de Gambo'. It is likely that easy sonatas for other instruments were played by this last generation of English amateur viol players, as indeed was viol music by other string players. Sir William Hamilton (having taken up the viola) wrote to Lord Herbert from Naples: 'I should think some of Abel's Musick for Viol di Gamba wou'd do well on the Tenor if you cou'd get any old solos or pieces of his Musick copied for me out of Lady Pembroke's books'. The last work with a part for 'Viola di Gamba' to be published in England was perhaps no.7 of William Jackson's *Twelve Songs*, op.16 (c1790).

**Ian Woodfield (with Lucy Robinson)**

## 5. Italy from c1580.

Virtuosity on the bass viol first reached spectacular heights with the Italian school of **VIOLA BASTARDA** playing, the seeds of which are found in the madrigal improvisations of Ortiz (1553). The fully-fledged *bastarda* style flourished from about 1580 to 1630; the first published



compositions were by Girolamo Dalla Casa (*Il vero modo di diminuir*, 1584) and the last by Vincenzo Bonizzi (*Alcune opere di diverse auttori a diverse voci, passaggiate principalmente per la viola bastarda*, 1626). In addition to its solo role, the viol continued to be used in ensembles. Pietro de' Bardi, in a letter to G.B. Doni (1634), recalled Vincenzo Galilei's *stile rappresentativo* setting of Dante's lament of Count Ugolino (performed with the Florentine Camerata in 1582) as being 'intelligibly sung by a good tenor and precisely accompanied by a consort of viols'. Monteverdi's scoring of *Orfeo* (1607) includes three *bassi da gamba*. In this work, as in the *intermedi* of the previous century, the contrasting instrumental timbres have an important symbolic significance: the viol family was associated with the gods, the supernatural and the nobility, and the bass members were thus suitable for depicting the underworld (with trombones). Monteverdi later specified a *contrabasso da Gamba* in his *Combattimento di Tancredi et Clorinda* of 1624 (published 1638).

As the 17th century progressed the viols were gradually ousted by the violin family: already by the time of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* the treble had fallen to the brilliant and fashionable violin (though it continued to be used in Germany until the middle of the century and in England and France for even longer). By the second quarter of the century Italian string continuo parts increasingly demanded the new cello. Writing from Rome in 1639, the French virtuoso André Maugars lamented

"as for the viol, there is no one in Italy now who excels at it; and indeed it is very little played in Rome, at which I was greatly astonished, since formerly they had Horatio [Bassani] of Parma, who did marvellous things with it and left to posterity some very fine pieces. "

Nevertheless the viol family did not die out. There is evidence that consorts of viols still persisted in cultural isolation, e.g. in Sicily and in convents, and the bass viol is specified in two Venetian operas of the 1670s, Petronio Franceschini's *Arsinoe* (1676) and Carlo Pallavicino's *Nerone* (1679). Ten patterns survive by Stradivari for a 'Viola da Gamba of the French Form' from 1701, and a number of fine Italian six- and seven-string instruments from the first two decades of the 18th century also exist. And despite its unpopularity at the time of Maugars' visit, it appears to have been particularly in Rome that an interest in the viol was rekindled in the early 18th century, notably by the patrons Benedetto Pamphili and F.M. Ruspoli. Pamphili employed a viol player named 'Monsieur Sciarli' and Ruspoli retained Bartolomeo Cimapano to play at his Sunday afternoon *conversazione*; and in 1708 the celebrated German virtuoso E.C. Hesse visited Italy, performing in Rome, Naples and Venice. The Roman lutenist Lelio Colista (1629–80) left a duet sonata for violin, bass viol and continuo and a further four (incomplete) sonatas which included the viol. Alessandro Scarlatti scored his cantata *Già sepolto è fra l'onda* for soprano, 2 violins, violetta, bass viol and continuo; the work was probably intended for a Roman patron. But the most significant compositions with bass viol are Handel's cantata *Tra le fiamme* (1707) for soprano, 2 recorders, 2 violins, bass viol and continuo and his sumptuous *Oratorio per la Resurrezione* (1708), composed for Pamphili and Ruspoli respectively. In the opening sonata of *La Resurrezione* the bass viol makes an arresting entrance as a member of the concertino group paired with the solo violin (played in the first performance by Corelli). Handel assigned to the viol melodic lines (commonly as the second part in a trio texture), Italianate arpeggiated figurations and figured bass; the choice of the viol for a Resurrection oratorio is in keeping with the German association of the viol representing the solace of the Resurrection.

## Lucy Robinson

## 6. France from c1600.

There was a strong late Renaissance tradition of viol playing in France, encouraged by the Académie de Poésie et de Musique which, under the direction of Jacques Mauduit, included viol consorts in its concerts. At first, as in Italy, viols were used to accompany voices, but soon purely instrumental genres became popular. The fantasias by Du Caurroy and Le Jeune and later Métru,

Roberday, Du Mont and Louis Couperin are evidence of this. These fantasias do not, however, exploit the resources of the viol as distinctively as their English counterparts. Indeed, many were played by viol consort, organ or other instruments according to the choice of the performers. Idiomatic English consort music was also known in France, and Mersenne chose a fantasia by Alfonso Ferrabosco (ii) as an illustration of viol music in his *Harmonie universelle* (1636–7). The viol was not only used in consort; Trichet recommended it as ‘highly suitable for all musical ensembles’. Herouard recalled a group comprising ‘a lutenist, a harpsichordist and violist named Pradel, an excellent player if ever there was’ playing for Louis XIII in 1609.

Both Mersenne and Jean Rousseau (A1687) paid tribute to the skills of André Maugars (c1580–c1645) as the first great French virtuoso. Maugars worked in London as a musician to James I in the 1620s and acknowledged his debt to the English players, particularly Ferrabosco, regarding their use of chords. Mersenne marvelled at Maugars' ability to execute alone ‘two, three or many parts on the bass viol, full of ornaments and with a rapidity of fingers which seemed to preoccupy him little’. Furthermore, Mersenne considered the viol to be the instrument which most perfectly imitated the human voice. He described the standard French viol as having six strings (tuned in 4ths with a 3rd in the middle) and his illustration of the modern viol portrays the classical English model. Rousseau named Nicolas Hotman (d 1663) as the next early player of distinction. On Louis Couperin's death in 1661, the position of viol player to the king was divided between Hotman and Sébastien Le Camus, ‘the two best players of the viol and theorbo that the King had ever heard’. In the 17th century it was normal for players to double on the viol and theorbo; Robert de Visée is another example. Hotman was celebrated for his *pièces d'harmonie* with beautiful melodies imitating the voice, in the style of the *air de cour*. Hotman taught De Machy, Rousseau and the celebrated Sainte-Colombe, teacher of Marin Marais. Rousseau credited Sainte-Colombe with introducing silver-covered strings, adding the seventh, low A string and developing a left-hand position in which the thumb fell behind the second finger instead of the first, as was common practice on the theorbo. This gave the left hand greater flexibility, and Rousseau especially commended Sainte-Colombe for his ability to imitate all the vocal graces. Sainte-Colombe's new hand position was the one that survived into the 18th century but for a while it caused deep division between the old-fashioned players led by De Machy, who remained faithful to the theorbo hand position, and the progressives of Sainte-Colombe's school. 67 *Concerts a deux violes esgales* (F-Pn) and 180 pieces for solo bass viol survive by Sainte-Colombe; they reveal a highly idiomatic and mature style, rich with chords and ornamentation. He was unique among viol player-composers in his use of unmeasured passages.

From about 1675 to 1760 the French virtuoso bass viol school led the rest of Europe in viol playing. Foreign virtuosos such as Ernst Christian Hesse were sent to Paris by their employers to study with viol players like Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray, and it was to Jean-Baptiste Forqueray that Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia looked for advice on viol playing. A large and important corpus of French viol music was also circulated in England, Germany and the Low Countries; Marais' *pièces de violes* were particularly widely known. The viol was often played in private concerts in the salons of the nobility, and professional players began to arrange recitals themselves; according to Titon du Tillet, Sainte-Colombe was known for ‘concerts *chez lui*, where two of his daughters played, one on the treble viol and the other on the bass, thus forming a *concert* for three viols with their father, which was a great pleasure to listen to’.

Both Louis XIV and Louis XV employed a viol player among their *Musiciens ordinaires de la chambre du roy*, and a demand for teachers arose as the instrument came to be considered a fashionable one for the nobility themselves to play. Amateur players at court included the Regent, the Duke of Orleans and Louis XV's daughter Princess Henriette Anne. Continuo playing constituted an important role for the viol in chamber music, and it was as a continuo instrument that it appeared in the *petit chœur* of the Académie Royale de Musique from the time of Lully until at least 1726, when Quantz heard Roland Marais and Jean-Baptiste Forqueray perform. But only rarely, as for example in the *air* ‘Beaux lieux’ added to the second version (1708) of Destouches' opera *Issé*, was the viol given an obbligato part.

Four important sources of information on viol playing were printed between 1685 and 1687: collections of *pièces de viole* (prefaced by long *avertissements*) by De Machy and Marais, and treatises by Danoville and Jean Rousseau containing comprehensive instruction on playing technique, the instrument and bow, tuning and ornamentation. 18th-century information is found in *avertissements* (particularly to the later collections by Marais), in Hubert Le Blanc's *Défense de la basse de viole* (A1740) and in a series of letters from Jean-Baptiste Forqueray to Friedrich



Wilhelm of Prussia which discuss the construction and stringing of the instrument as well as its playing technique. In the late 17th century, taste dictated playing in the 1st or half-position whenever possible, but by the 18th century viol players began using the upper positions on the three top strings to avoid changing position unnecessarily. From 1717 Marais frequently used positions from the seventh fret upwards, known as the *petit manche*. Jean-Baptiste Forqueray developed this technique still further when, inspired by the mid-18th-century virtuoso violinists such as Leclair, he aimed to achieve a smooth and unified line by extensive use of the *petit manche*, on both high and low strings. This produced new and unusual tone colours and enabled him to obtain an exotic new range of chords (not only in the *petit manche* but also combined with open strings). The *pièces de viole* were often, when composed by a viol player, carefully marked with fingering, bowing and ornament signs. Ornaments played an essential rhetorical role in *pièces de viole*, just as in the *airs de cour* on which they were modelled. Rousseau described them as a 'melodic salt which seasons the melody and gives it taste'. Viol ornaments included the rare semitone glissando (called by Marais the *coulé de doigt*) and a form of vibrato in which a finger is placed on the string, touching the one on the fret, beating lightly on the string 'with an even shaking movement'. This kind of vibrato, which Marais indicated by a horizontal wavy line, was often preferred to a one-finger vibrato (used on the modern cello and indicated by Marais with a vertical wavy line), except of course when the note itself was played by the little finger. Vibrato is regularly marked only in *tombaux*, *plaintes* and suchlike pieces; the *coulé de doigt* was regarded as suitable for 'languishing melodies', generally on the second finger and ascending, though according to Rousseau it could be used descending as well.

Jean-Baptiste Forqueray drew special attention to the bowing hand: 'it should express all the passions ... [the middle] finger presses on the hair to make more or less sound, and by pressing and relaxing imperceptibly this makes the expression both soft and loud'. By 1725 a variety of different bowstrokes had been developed, including enormous slurs of 24 notes and more, portato bowing on both single notes and chords, and the tremolo. Le Blanc (p.83) described the rich yet airy and resonant sound that the great French viol players made:

"Père Marais and Forcroy le Père ... strove to make a sonorous sound, like the Great Bell of St Germain, which they achieved by playing on air just as they recommended, that is to say that having bowed a stroke they allowed time for the string to vibrate."

He went on, however, to distinguish between the 'old' style of Marais which resembled 'so much the plucking of the lute and guitar' and the 'new' mid-18th-century technique characterized by the imperceptible bow change 'which reproduces and multiplies the expression like the Sun's rays'.

TABLE 7

~	two-finger vibrato
~	one-finger vibrato
~	roll
~	accents
~	raz (down-bow)
~	coulé de doigt
1, 2, 3, 4	1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th finger
4	4th finger: no 3rd string

The term 'pièce de viole' generally implies music for one viol and continuo, which was likely to consist of a second viol with harpsichord or theorbo (the latter was strongly recommended by Marais). There are also *pièces de viole* for two unaccompanied viols (notably Sainte-Colombe's *Concerts à deux violes esgales*) and for two viols and continuo (including pieces by Marais in his first and fourth books of *pièces de violes*); furthermore there are solo *pièces d'harmonie* for viol, among them four suites by Du Buisson of 1666 and pieces by De Machy. The latter's collection of 1685 is the first published set of *pièces de viole*; four suites are written in staff notation and four in tablature. From 1685 to 1748 a constant stream of *pièces de viole*, usually by viol players, were published; Marais, the outstanding and most prolific composer of this school, published five books (596 pieces) between 1686 and 1725; his works are remarkable for their exceptional craftsmanship and variety. Other important composers were De Machy, Caix d'Hervelois, Morel, François Couperin, Cappus, Roland Marais, Dollé and Jean-Baptiste Forqueray – all professional viol players except Couperin. *Pièces de viole* were normally arranged in suites; those of the late 17th century usually comprised a prelude and a conventional selection of dances, but 18th-century suites contained an increasing number of *pièces de caractère* (such as Marais' *Le tableau de l'opération de la taille*). The French style of virtuoso writing for the viol is characterized

by an extensive use of chords, which are particularly idiomatic to the viol because of its frets. De Machy likened writing for the viol without chords to playing the harpsichord or organ with only one hand.

Independent parts for the viol in chamber music appeared before the end of the 17th century in works such as Charpentier's *Sonate à 8* (c1686) and the *sonades* of François Couperin (early 1690s); and in scattered movements in works for violin (or flute) and continuo by Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1707), La Ferté (1707), Dornel (1711), Jean-Féry Rebel (1713) and Montéclair (1724–5) the viol is often freed from the bass. Violin, viol and continuo was a medium used by several composers including Marais, in his 1723 book *La gamme et autres morceaux* (where the *Sonnerie de Sainte-Geneviève du Mont de Paris* is found), Leclair (op.2 no.8, c1728) and Boismortier (1732, 1734); and Louis-Gabriel Guillemain included the viol in his *Sonâtes en quatuors* (1743, 1748). Several solo and trio collections were issued with a part for viol, cello or bassoon. Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741) for violin (or flute), viol and harpsichord contains some of the finest French Baroque chamber music; here the viol plays an independent part which generally lies above the bass line, sometimes even in the same register as the violin.

In the early decades of the 18th century, the secular *cantate* came into vogue and some composers, including Bourgeois, Bousset, Clérambault, Montéclair, Rameau and Stuck, used the viol there as a concertante instrument as well as for continuo. They did not attempt to write for the viol in the style of their player-composer contemporaries, but rather exploited the viol's tone quality, weaving a melodic line around that of the voice and often using the same motivic material for both parts. Occasionally the viol was offered as an alternative for a concertante flute part, for example in collections by Clérambault and Collin de Blamont.

The French bass viol was a large, lightly built instrument, which generally had seven strings though some survive with six. Le Blanc described its tone as like 'the voice of an Ambassador, delicate and even a little nasal, always being highly proper'. The internal workmanship was extremely delicate: the linings were of linen or parchment and occasionally a series of little cubes of wood was used between the table and ribs to increase the adhesive area. Michel Collichon (fl 1666–93) was highly regarded as a maker in the latter half of the 17th century. Nicolas Bertrand and Guillaume Barbey were the most celebrated of the next generation, their finest viols being valued at around 100 livres. Both Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray possessed instruments by Barbey; nonetheless the outstanding viol in the inventory taken at Marais' death was 'une viole Anglaise fait par Robert Grille en mil sixcens seize' valued at 600 livres. Jean-Baptiste Forqueray believed Barbey to be 'the best maker we have had for the shape, thickness, quality and dimensions' and explained that his father had two of Barbey's viols 'l'une pour les pièces, l'autre pour l'accompagnement'. He also wrote on the importance of setting up the viol correctly so as to obtain a free sound and promote ease of playing, and the necessity of the strings being in true proportion to one another. He advocated that the lowest four strings be covered with the same covering (the C string half covered) and warned that too much rosin on the bow would make it liable to squeak and dull the tone. By the 1740s the 'pardessus de viole' was valued more highly than the bass; André Castagnery's bass viols were priced at 6 livres whereas his pardessus were estimated at between 10 and 12 livres in the inventory taken at his death in 1747. The finest pardessus of Jean-Baptiste Salomon (1713–48) and Louis Guersan were the most expensive instruments of their genre at up to 38 livres; some of Guersan's pardessus and quintons were still valued at between 30 and 36 livres in 1770.

Between the late 17th and mid-18th centuries the bass viol was gradually superseded throughout Europe by the cello as the string continuo instrument. In the early Baroque period, the bass member of the violin family had been less refined in tone than an 18th-century cello, so the viol was preferred for its beautiful sound and ease in playing fast passages. But as the cello and its stringing were improved, and instrument making in general was developed, the cello was favoured because it was better suited to supporting the louder 18th-century ensemble. It overtook the viol first in Italy, where fine cellos were made from the middle of the 17th century, and later in France as well as in England and Germany as the Italian innovations in cello making and playing spread to the rest of Europe. Le Blanc and Jean-Baptiste Forqueray fought a fierce rearguard action on behalf of the bass viol, but though Forqueray's talents were highly respected, Ancelet remarked in his *Observations sur la musique, les musiciens et les instrumens* (Amsterdam, 1757) that 'the Violoncello, which is without doubt one of the most beautiful instruments ... is generally used everywhere ... Only the Basse de Viole declared war on the Violoncello, which won the

victory'.

In France, unlike the rest of Europe, treble viols remained popular long after the demise of the viol consort. Louis Couperin and Sébastien Le Camus were renowned treble players in the mid-17th century. Rousseau emphasized the vocal character of the instrument and the need to adopt 'la délicatesse du Chant' and 'to imitate all a beautiful Voice might do with all the charms of the Art'. He proceeded by stressing that 'one must not abandon the spirit of the instrument, which does not wish to be treated like a violin, with which it is correct to animate, in place of which it is correct for the *Dessus de Viole* to flatter'. Initially the treble viol largely played instrumental renditions of the fashionable *airs de cour*, although there are fine 17th-century obbligati for it, notably in sacred works by Du Mont and Charpentier, particularly the latter's *1ère leçon du vendredi* ('De lamentatione Jeremiae'). The first published music for the *dessus de viole* was Louis Heudelinne's *Trois suites de pièces à deux violles* (Paris, 1701). By this time the *dessus* had become popular among noble ladies; it was believed to be more appropriate for women to play a small viol on their lap rather than a violin on their shoulder.

As the vogue for the new Italian violin sonata grew, the six-stringed *pardessus de viole* was developed on which the low *d* of the treble viol was exchanged for a high *g*", enabling players to reach top *d*"", necessary for playing violin music, in 1st position. By the time Michel Corrette published his *Méthode pour apprendre facilement à jouer du pardessus de viole à 5 et à 6 cordes* (A1748) a new variant, the quinton, had been 'invented', strung with the bottom three strings like the lowest three on the violin and the top two in the manner of the *pardessus*: *g-d'-a'-d"-g"*. Corrette described this 'new instrument' as having the refined 'flute-like treble of the *pardessus de viole* and the sonorous bass of the violin' adding that 'it sounds much better than the ordinary *Pardessus*'; he recommended it unreservedly for 'violin sonatas and concertos'. Corrette, Ancelet and Brijon praised the playing of Mlle Levi, who rendered 'her instrument equal to a violin by the beauty of her playing'. By the 1760s a third type of *pardessus*, with four strings tuned like a violin, had emerged. The celebrated violinist L'abbé *le fils* mentioned it on the title page of his *Principes* (1761): 'Those people who play the four-string *Pardessus* can use these *Principes*, they only have to remember to give the opposite significance to the bowing signs'. And Brijon remarked in his *Méthode nouvelle et facile pour apprendre à jouer du par-dessus de viole* (A1766) that 'in Paris lots of people play the *pardessus* with four strings'. Interestingly Brijon, who was a violinist, suggested using an overhand bowing on the *pardessus*. About 20 volumes of *pièces* and *sonates* were published specifically for the *dessus* and *pardessus*. Some of the finest music is by Dollé and Barthélemy de Caix; other composers include Thomas Marc, Jean Barrière, C.H. de Blainville, and Louis de Caix d'Hervelois. Villeneuve transcribed over 200 of Marais' *pièces* and published them under the title *Pièces de viole ajustées pour le pardessus de viole à cinq cordes* (Paris, 1759). There is also a wealth of duos for two *pardessus*, flutes, violins or *vielles*. The *pardessus*' popularity outlived that of the bass viol; as late as 1783 the *Almanach musical* advertised 'trois Maîtres du pardessus de viole'.

**Lucy Robinson**

## 7. Germany and the Low Countries from c1600.

During the late 16th century and the first half of the 17th a number of English musicians took up employment in Germany, Denmark, Austria, the Low Countries and Spain. Among them were six virtuoso violists: William Brade, Thomas Simpson, Walter Rowe, Daniel Norcombe, Henry Butler and William Young. They had a major effect on the development of continental viol playing, Rousseau declaring that it was the 'English who were the first to compose and play chordal pieces on the viol, and who exported their knowledge to other Kingdoms'. Brade and Simpson both published collections of consort music; Simpson's volumes include many dances by his English contemporaries, e.g. Robert Bateman, John Dowland, John Farmer (i), Alfonso Ferrabosco (ii), Robert Johnson (ii), Peter Philips and Thomas Tomkins, as well as works by German composers. The pavan was the form that particularly attracted Anglo-German composers to display their most sustained and complex musical ideas, corresponding to the role held by the fantasia in England. German composers such as Valentin Haussman and Melchior Franck published instrumental music which began to show idiomatic string characteristics. Other

volumes of dance music, such as Schein's *Banchetto musicale* (Leipzig, 1617), group the dances into suites (Padouana, Gagliarda, Courente, Allemande and Tripla). The viol is designated in some of the progressive three- and four-part *Canzoni e concerti* (1627) by the Polish violinist Adam Jarzebski. In 1649 Johann Hentzschel published a canzona for eight bass viols and continuo in a solemn, contrapuntal Venetian style using double choir writing. David Funck's *Stricturae viola di gambicae, ex sonatis, ariis, intradis, allemandis* (Leipzig, 1677) for four bass viols exploits the viol's full three-octave range. The divisions composed by Daniel Norcombe and Henry Butler, who worked in Brussels and Spain respectively, were warmly commended by Christopher Simpson as models 'worthy to be imitated'. Butler's 13 surviving sets are of grand proportions, exploring the range of the instrument with taxing virtuosity and developing up to 49 variations. The first published sonatas by an Englishman were William Young's *Sonatae à 3, 4, e 5* for two to four violins, obbligato bass viol and continuo (Innsbruck, 1653). The virtuosity displayed by the British expatriates was taken up by their continental pupils, most notably Johann Schop (i), Nicolaus Bleyer and Gabriel Schütz.

An indication of the viol's high profile in 17th-century Germany is its frequent appearance in the scoring of the new Lutheran church music. The German predilection for consorts of low instruments is clearly evident in the many sacred works scored for multiple bass viols, both alongside other instruments and as a consort of their own. Ensembles consisting of three viols with two violins superimposed were common, as was a consort of four viols. Often the inner parts of 17th-century cantatas are simply marked 'viola' and it is uncertain whether they were intended for violas *da gamba* or *da braccia*; in the middle of the century it seems that whichever instrument was more readily available took the part, but later the violas *da braccia* increasingly ousted the violas *da gamba*. An early use of a consort of viols in German sacred music is Heinrich Schütz's *Historia der ... Auferstehung ... Jesu Christi* (1623), in which Schütz used four bass viols to accompany the Evangelist. Thomas Selle wrote for two obbligato bass viols in his *St John Passion* (1641–3), Johann Sebastiani used four in his *St Matthew Passion* (1663), and Johann Thiele used two for the inner parts of his *St Matthew Passion* (1673), employing dramatic tremoli to depict an earthquake. Idiomatic bass viol parts appear in eight of Buxtehude's cantatas; his *Jubilate Domino* for alto, viol and continuo demands a range of three and a half octaves (*D to a*) and begins with a 'sonata' for viol and continuo; both *Laudate pueri* and *Ad cor: vulnerasti cor meum* are scored for five bass viols. This last cantata is an eloquent and deeply felt Lutheran *lamento* and a fine example of the 17th-century German use of viols to express that affect. The final section incorporates tremolo quavers for the viols (embellishing the return of the opening material), a device which Buxtehude reserved for particularly expressive phrases. Many other sacred German works are scored for viols, including Franz Tunder's wonderful chorale prelude for five viols and soprano, *An Wasserflüssen Babylon*, whose disturbed chromaticism anticipates Bach. In central and southern Germany the viol continued to be used in sacred compositions until the 1680s, after it had fallen from favour in the north. Viols were not, however, the exclusive preserve of Protestant music. Roman Catholic Austria maintained a tradition of viol playing, despite the prevailing taste for Italian music, from the time of John Price (i) and William Young until the 1730s. Here as in north Germany viols were associated with the affect of *lamento*, and were used in the uniquely Viennese Passiontide genre, the *sepolcro*. A.M. Bononcini, Antonio Draghi and G.B. Pederzuoli all wrote for the viol as did Emperor Leopold I.

With the universal acceptance of the Italian four-part string quartet as the core of the 18th-century orchestra, the viol lost its position in the instrumental ensemble of Protestant church music. However, 18th-century composers occasionally chose to employ its unusual timbre for special effect, particularly in Passions and funeral compositions. Telemann used two in his funeral cantata *Du aber, Daniel, gehe hin* and C.P.E. Bach also employed two in his *St Mark Passion*. The outstanding composer of 18th-century sacred music for viol was J.S. Bach, who scored for it in three sacred cantatas (BWV 76, 106 and 152), the *Trauer Ode* (BWV 198) and three Passions. His most famous arias with obbligato viol are 'Es ist vollbracht' in the *St John Passion* and 'Komm süßes Kreuz' in the *St Matthew Passion*; the latter is preceded by an arpeggiated recitative and features a virtuoso chordal obbligato (originally conceived for lute) – Bach's only truly idiomatic writing for the viol in the French virtuoso style. In these arias Bach, following the 17th-century tradition, used the viol to symbolize the lament for and the kingship of the person of Christ. Parallel with its role in sacred vocal music, the viol was also used in secular continuo lieder by Heinrich Albert, Georg Neumark and Thiele. Viol obligatos are found in Viennese operas by Antonio Cesti, Fux and Ziani, and the instrument features in secular cantatas by Christian Geist, J.G. Graun and J.A. Hasse. Bach also used it in his cantata *Äolus*.



Lady playing the treble viol: portrait by Caspar Netscher, c1670 (private collection)

The German-Netherlandish virtuoso viol school had its roots in the English division style, as exemplified by Nicolaus a Kempis's divisions on Philips's *Pavana dolorosa* (Antwerp, 1642), but towards the end of the 17th century it came under the influence of the latest virtuoso techniques of the thriving Italian-inspired Austro-German violin school. The marriage of ideas was facilitated by the fact that many 17th-century German string players, such as Schop, Nicolaus Bleyer and Biber, played both the violin and the viol. Thus bold passages of showy scales and arpeggios are increasingly found alongside the more rhythmically intricate English figurations, which in turn virtually disappear after August Kühnel (1645–c1700). German viol player-composers also assimilated ideas from the improvisatory *style phantastico* of the north German organists; this is manifest in a taste for abrupt tempo changes, exciting chordal passages (often marked arpeggio) and dramatic pause marks, the latter occurring not only in preludes but also in the middle of dance movements. Finally some of these virtuosos, notably Johannes Schenck, introduced elements of the French dance suite and the delicate *style brisé* technique. German and Netherlandish viol players and composers generally did not finger their music (unlike the French), although Kühnel gave some guidance in this respect, and as regards ornamentation they did no more than mark the occasional trill with a cross (+). The Netherlands school included Carolus Hacquart and Jacob Riehman, who were both employed by the nobility. Schenck was the most prolific composer of the school producing ten collections of music between 1685 and 1710; his four surviving viol publications are the most important legacy of the German and Netherlandish tradition. Schenck's first publication of viol music, *Tyd en konst-oeffeningen* (Amsterdam, 1688), comprises 15 sonatas for viol and continuo of a breathtakingly virtuosic nature. In marked contrast to his outstanding French contemporary Marais, Schenck relished virtuosity as an end in itself. Multiple stopping, polyphonic writing and the use of high positions are hallmarks of his style. This cultivation of virtuosity finds a parallel in the brilliant violin sonatas of J.J. Walther. Schenck sometimes required the continuo viol to depart from its normal role and become an obbligato instrument (ex.4). Kühnel's *Sonate ô partite* (Kassel, 1698) consist of six works for two viols and continuo followed by eight for a single viol and continuo; the final four may be played unaccompanied. Some movements take the form of virtuosic divisions on Lutheran chorale melodies. The virtuosic obbligatos in the sacred works of J.P. Krieger were presumably written for the viol player Konrad Höffler, with whom Krieger had a lifelong association. Gottfried Finger was unique among the later viol players in using scordatura tunings, a technique that he probably acquired from Biber. Telemann wrote one work in the German virtuosic tradition, his unaccompanied sonata in D. Carl Friedrich Abel was the last member of the German school; his 27 brilliantly virtuosic unaccompanied pieces employ the gamut of virtuoso string techniques such as resonant arpeggiated passage work and large slurs of up to 30 notes, some of which are marked staccato.

Ex.4 Johannes Schenck: L'echo du Danube op.9 no.2 Amsterdam, 1704



Ex.4 Johannes Schenck: L'echo du Danube, op.9 no.2 (Amsterdam, 1704)

The viol was also incorporated in Austro-German chamber music, although the parts were generally less idiomatic. In the second half of the 17th century, there was a vogue for writing trio (and occasionally four-part) sonatas for one (or two) violins, obbligato bass viol and continuo.

This seems to have originated in Austria with Young and J.H. Schmelzer, and swiftly reached the southern German states where such compositions were published by Matthias Kelz (ii), J.M. Nicolai, Johann Rosenmüller, J.P. Krieger and others. The Hamburg musicians Dietrich Becker and J.A. Reincken also published works of this type but the crowning achievements of this fashionable genre were Buxtehude's two collections (Hamburg, ?1694 and 1696), which, with the funeral music for his father, were the only major compositions published during his lifetime. In the 18th century, diversity of scoring became a feature of north German composers and the viol was frequently paired with the flute or recorder. The most prolific composer of trios and quartets incorporating viols was Telemann, but there are also works by J.C. Schickhardt, Antonio Lotti, J.C. Pepusch, J.M. Molter and Theodor Schwartzkopff; these last two composers both include a treble as well as a bass viol. When Telemann visited Paris in 1737, he played his celebrated Paris Quartets (for flute, violin, viol and cello with continuo) with J.-B. Forqueray among others; Telemann recalled how the exquisite playing of the artists 'made the ears of the court unusually attentive, and won me, in a short time, an almost universal honour, which was accompanied with increasing politeness'. Telemann also wrote three sonatas for viol and continuo, which, though sensitively written for the instrument, do not exploit it idiomatically. Abel's tuneful sonatas for viol and keyboard make few technical demands (unlike his unaccompanied works) and seem intended for amateurs. A distinctive north German genre was the sonata for solo instrument with obbligato keyboard; early works for the viol survive by J.M. Leffloth and Johann Pfeiffer but the most penetrating and expressive examples are the three sonatas by J.S. Bach. Surviving evidence suggests that they were written late in his career at Leipzig, possibly for C.F. Abel. Bach arranged the G major sonata from a trio sonata for two flutes; the D major sonata concludes with a lively cadenza-like episode and like the *St Matthew Passion* calls for a seven-string viol; the G minor sonata is conceived in three movements in a grand concerted manner. Bach also used a pair of viols in the ripieno group in his Sixth Brandenburg Concerto, where they support and contrast with the two solo violas.

There were three distinct German schools of viol making, emanating from Austria and south Germany, Saxony and central Germany, and north Germany and the Baltic. Of the Tyrolean school, viols survive by Busch, Hiltz and Kögel from the first half of the 17th century, some of which use a festoon outline. The most celebrated maker was Jacob Stainer, who modelled his viols on those of William Young. He generally built a traditional flat back and shoulders, although the influence of the Italian violin is equally apparent in his characteristically strongly contoured, carved table and, latterly, his use of f-holes. Hawkins praised Stainer's instruments for their 'full and piercing tone'. In the Saxon area of central Germany, Hoffman was a leading maker, working in Leipzig. Viols of the north German and Baltic tradition demonstrate a strong influence from English makers and used bent fronts in two, three, four, five or seven pieces until about 1710. Joachim Tielke was Germany's most renowned viol maker, securing commissions for his highly prized instruments from the nobility and royalty. About 50 of his viols survive; all of them are basses. As a gifted and creative craftsman, Tielke developed the Anglo-German model he inherited. In about 1683 he largely forsook the traditional flat back and began to carve a solid gently arched back without bent shoulders; his viols from that date thus became heavier than their English and French counterparts, and he also favoured a thicker two-piece front. Until 1685 he maintained the north German tradition of carving rosettes in the belly of his viols but after that date they only occur on his most extravagantly ornamented instruments. By 1696 he had settled for a neck of 30.5 cm although three sizes of bass viol are found. Tielke is particularly renowned for his consummate powers of decoration. All his extant viols have carved heads (most commonly women's or lions' heads). Vine leaves and blossoms are his favoured form of motif; they appear in relief on the sides and back of the pegbox and in white (ivory) and black (ebony) inlay on the fingerboard and tailpiece. Tielke also worked with tortoiseshell and, in his most elaborate designs, silver and gold.

At the same time as the bass viol was losing popularity in France, it enjoyed a final flowering at the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin, where there had been a strong tradition of viol playing since the time of Brade and Rowe. The court viol player Ludwig Christian Hesse (1716–72), described by Hiller as 'incontestably the greatest viol player in our time in Europe', inspired sonatas, trios and concertos in the remarkably virtuosic 'Berlin' style from composers such as J.G. Graun, C.P.E. Bach, Christoph Schaffrath and J.G. Janitsch. Many of the sonatas (a number of which have obbligato keyboard) are technically highly demanding. The most unusual form was the concerto, of which at least eight were written by J.G. Graun (two of which are for more than one instrument). In these works the viol comments on the orchestral tutti using rich double stops and



chains of 3rds, a notable feature of this late style. Concertos by Johann Pfeiffer, Telemann (both for solo viol and multiple instruments) and Tartini also survive. Hesse arranged 72 French operas (including works by Rameau) for performance by Prince Friedrich Wilhelm and himself on two viols (sometimes with other instruments) and at least a further three by C.H. Graun. Interest in the viol in Berlin finally faded when Friedrich Wilhelm switched his allegiance to the cello in the early 1770s.

Further south, viol playing lingered on. Burney reported that Elector Maximilian Joseph III of Bavaria played the viol until his death in 1777 adding that 'next to Abel, [he] was the best performer on the viol da gamba I have ever heard'. The Austrian baryton virtuoso Andreas Lidl also played the viol; Burney commended his playing for its 'exquisite taste and expression'. Both Lidl and Franz Xaver Hammer wrote some highly virtuosic duos in an early Classical style for bass viol accompanied by the cello. Lidl also left six sonatas for violin, bass viol and cello. Joseph Fiala served the Archbishop of Salzburg as a viol player and oboist between 1778 and 1785; on his return to Germany in 1790 he performed on the viol before King Friedrich Wilhelm II in Prague, Breslau and Berlin. His extant compositions include a trio for viol, violin and cello. Simon Truska (1743–1809), who played, composed music for and built viols, is listed in 1796 among the important musicians in Prague. Dictionary articles around the turn of the century affirm the viol's demise; Gerber declared that 'if you wanted a viola da gamba, you would have to dig up a stringless, worm-eaten example from some court music room' (*GerberNL*).

## Lucy Robinson

## 8. The modern revival.

Not long after the viol finally died out in Austria and Bohemia, the French, notably Fétis, considered it ripe for revival and included it in a series of 'concerts historiques' in the 1832–3 season. A reviewer in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* pointed out that Fétis's viol was tuned like a cello, but added that it sounded a little more 'tender'. In 1859 the viol featured prominently in Julius Rietz's opera *Georg Neumark und die Gamba*. Rietz, a cellist, conductor and musicologist, was a close friend of Mendelssohn and deeply involved in the revival of 18th-century music. For the performances of the opera the court library loaned an instrument by Tielke, which was played by the virtuoso cellist Bernhard Cossmann.

From the mid-1870s the pursuit of resurrecting the viol was taken up predominantly by cellists curious about the ancestry of their instrument (the viol was then considered to be the precursor of the cello). The distinguished cellists Auguste Tolbecque and Paul de Wit acquired bass viols and stimulated interest by playing them in public. At first they played Tartini, Boccherini and Mendelssohn but they soon focussed their attention on the riches of the bass viol literature. Tolbeque performed one of Rameau's *Pièces de claveçin en concerts* in April 1880 with Saint-Saëns and the flautist Paul Taffanel; the reviewer in *Le ménestrel* observed that the performance would have been improved had Saint-Saëns played a harpsichord instead of the piano. In 1889 the *Musical Times* reported that a Société des Instruments Anciens had been formed in Brussels by Louis van Waefelghem, Louis Diémer, Jules Delsart (bass viol) and Laurent Grillet 'for the study and practice of instruments once in general favour but now almost unknown to our concert rooms, such as the clavicembalo, the viola da gamba, the viol d'amore ... members of this body have already given historical concerts with much success'. This society disbanded within a decade, but was followed in 1901 by the Société des Instruments Anciens Casadesus, formed by Henri Casadesus with encouragement from Saint-Saëns, in which Henri's sister-in-law Lucette played the viol (see [CASADESUS \(2\)](#)).

Most performers on the bass viol in the late 19th century and first half of the 20th played the viol like a cello, with an endpin, a cello-like thin and rounded neck and fingerboard, a cello bow and no frets. In addition the viol was fitted with a thick, cello-like bass bar and soundpost, and heavily reinforced with thick linings to support its unnatural set-up. Arnold Dolmetsch was intuitively aware that the viol was being misunderstood, despite his initial scanty knowledge of the instrument and its music. In the 1890s, after considerable research into music and instruments of the 16th to 18th centuries, he began to give concerts on original instruments including viols.

*The Times* reported in 1892 how 'Mr Dolmetsch brought forth several interesting concerted works for the viols – among them a beautiful "Dovehouse Pavan" by Alfonso Ferrabosco ... Miss Dolmetsch displayed her remarkable skill on a viola da gamba in a long chaconne by Marin Marais, a composer whose revival is entirely due to Mr Dolmetsch'. These concerts won the recognition of the Bloomsbury circle, and Bernard Shaw speculated prophetically:

"If we went back to old viols ... I suppose we should have to begin to make them again; and I wonder what would be the result of that ... if our fiddle-makers were to attempt to revive them, they would probably aim at the sort of 'power' of tone produced by those violins which ingenious street-players make out of empty Australian mutton tins and odd legs of stools. "

In 1938, the year before Dolmetsch's death, Percy Scholes wrote that the viol was played by 'a small (but growing) body of devoted students'. Many of these were in fact pupils of Dolmetsch, but Paul Grümmer's *Viola da Gamba-Schule* (Leipzig, 1928) shows that a parallel revival was taking place in Germany, pioneered by the scholar Max Seiffert and the instrument maker Peter Harlan. Grümmer encouraged his pupil, the young Swiss cellist August Wenzinger, to nurture his interest in the bass viol, and in 1933 Wenzinger was one of the founders of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (the first institution for the research, performance and teaching of early music), where he taught the viol. Viol playing was uncommon in America until after World War II. However, in 1929 the American Society of Ancient Musicians was founded in Philadelphia by Ben and Flora Stad, who were inspired by the playing of Casadesus with whom they had both studied in Paris in the early 1920s. The Stads' group included three sizes of viol, and by the time Ben Stad died in 1946 his ensemble's concerts, recordings and festivals had brought the viol's sound to many East Coast Americans. The viol made slow but sure progress in the 1950s. It was not without provocation that Vaughan Williams wrote to Michael Kennedy on 9 May 1957:

"With regard to that aria in the Matthew P. about bearing the Cross. I was told that at the first performance under Mendelssohn this was the hit of the evening – apparently they used to encore things they liked at those early performances. I have an idea that I will put it in my next performance. But it will have to be rearranged for three cellos. I will not have a viola da gamba inside the building."

The viol's postwar renaissance is marked by three distinctive styles of playing: English, German and Netherlandish. The English school stems from Dolmetsch and has been closely associated with the performance of English consort music. In 1962 Francis and June Baines founded the Jaye Consort of Viols (named after the 17th-century English maker Henry Jaye, whose instruments they primarily used). Their distinctive playing style, which exploits the viol's natural resonance to the full, has similarities with the use that English choirs (particularly that of King's College, Cambridge) make of their highly resonant chapels. Furthermore both groups of musicians present their musical points in a sweet, relaxed and undriven manner, which gives the feeling of floating. The viol consort Fretwork, founded in 1985 (perhaps the most vibrant group of their time) has adopted a more rhythmically defined, rhetorical and conversational style. Besides recording most of the classic English consort music from Byrd to Purcell, Fretwork has broadened the viol's repertory by commissioning works from a wide range of contemporary composers, including George Benjamin (*Upon Silence*, 1990), Tan Dun (*A Sinking Love*, 1995), Barry Guy (*Buzz*, 1994), Thea Musgrave (*Wild Winter*, 1993) and Peter Sculthorpe (*Djilile*, 1995). Laurence Dreyfus's consort Phantasm and the Rose Consort have also received critical acclaim. The German school of playing was originally centred on the work of Wenzinger in Basle. Although his style was derived from the same primary sources as the English school, his manner of playing might be seen as its antithesis. It is true that Wenzinger's repertory focussed more on 18th-century French and German solo music, but his performance was characterized by an intense, rhythmically animated manner, driving forward to the cadence in long sustained melodic lines. Wenzinger's playing style has been disseminated all over the world by his many pupils. His influence on American playing is particularly significant; as early as 1953 he spent a term lecturing and teaching at Harvard and in the 1970s he made frequent visits to the Oberlin summer school. The Netherlands school of viol playing is the youngest of the three and has its origins in the playing of the Belgian Wieland Kuijken. His intense, yet restrained style with exquisite

sensitivity to the smallest nuance lends itself to the performance of Marais, yet he is a player of catholic tastes whose performances of Ortiz, Simpson, Bach and Abel are no less satisfying. Many of the leading viol players of the late 20th century studied with Kuijken – Jordi Savall, Christophe Coin, Laurence Dreyfus, Sarah Cunningham and Susanne Heinrich – and his approach has greatly influenced European playing. Jordi Savall has recorded much of the solo viol repertory and has been a highly influential teacher at Basle; his Italian pupil Paolo Pandolfo has delighted audiences with his fresh, wildly inventive, improvisatory approach, not least as regards viola bastarda music.

The American John Hsu is a player of distinction who has developed his own independent style. Hsu is particularly solicitous to the influence that Baroque gesture had on contemporary performing practice; this has led him to develop an intensely subtle bowing technique which moulds the melodic line into a series of gestures, which he expounds in his *Handbook of French Baroque Viol Technique* (E1981). Alison Crum's *Play the Viol* (B1989) primarily addresses the amateur market. In 1998 Paolo Biordi and Vittorio Ghielmi published a more advanced and comprehensive tutor entitled *Methodo completo e progressivo per viola da gamba*. Since World War II interest in the viol has also been fostered in England by the Viola da Gamba Society (founded in 1948) and in the USA by the Viola da Gamba Society of America (1963), both of which publish journals with scholarly articles as well as notices of current activities. German-speaking countries are served by the Viola da Gamba Mitteilungen of Switzerland, which keeps players informed of concerts and has short features concerning the viol. By the late 1970s interest in viol playing had spread throughout the English-speaking world, Europe and Japan. Universities and music colleges purchased consorts of viols; adults took up the instrument as amateurs; and children were introduced to it without first having developed a modern violin or cello technique. In 1991 Marais became a household name in France after the success of the film *Tous les Matins du Monde*, loosely based on the lives of Sainte-Colombe and his pupil.

In the late 20th century many excellent instruments have been built based on classical models by makers such as Jane Julier, Dietrich Kessler and David Rubio in Britain, François Bodart in Belgium, Pierre Jacquier and Guy de Ra in France, Pilman Muthesius and Ossenbrunner in Germany, and Paul Reichlin in Switzerland. Fine copies of Baroque bows are made by Boumann (Netherlands), Landwehr (Germany), Fausto Cangelosi (Italy), Patigny (Belgium), Hans Reiners (Germany) and Luis Emilio Rodriguez (Netherlands). The viol's unusual sound has inspired works from many contemporary composers, including Peter Maxwell Davies, Peter Dickinson and David Loeb, in addition to those mentioned above.

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